

# CHAPTER XI

## FLUENCY THROUGH PREPARATION

Animis opibusque parati—Ready in mind and resources.

—*Motto of South Carolina.*

In omnibus negotiis prius quam aggrediare, adhibenda est præparatio diligens—In all matters before beginning a diligent preparation should be made.

—CICERO, *De Officiis*.

Take your dictionary and look up the words that contain the Latin stem *flu*—the results will be suggestive.

At first blush it would seem that fluency consists in a ready, easy use of words. Not so—the flowing quality of speech is much more, for it is a composite effect, with each of its prior conditions deserving of careful notice.

### *The Sources of Fluency*

Speaking broadly, fluency is almost entirely a matter of preparation. Certainly, native gifts figure largely here, as in every art, but even natural facility is dependent on the very same laws of preparation that hold good for the man of supposedly small native endowment. Let this encourage you if, like Moses, you are prone to complain that you are not a ready speaker.

Have you ever stopped to analyze that expression, “a ready speaker?” Readiness, in its prime sense, is preparedness, and they are most ready who are best prepared. Quick firing depends more on the alert finger than on the hair trigger. Your fluency will be in direct ratio to two important conditions: your knowledge of what you are going to say, and your being accustomed to telling what you know to an audience. This gives us the second great

element of fluency—to preparation must be added the ease that arises from practise; of which more presently.

### *Knowledge is Essential*

Mr. Bryan is a most fluent speaker when he speaks on political problems, tendencies of the time, and questions of morals. It is to be supposed, however, that he would not be so fluent in speaking on the bird life of the Florida Everglades. Mr. John Burroughs might be at his best on this last subject, yet entirely lost in talking about international law. Do not expect to speak fluently on a subject that you know little or nothing about. Ctesiphon boasted that he could speak all day (a sin in itself) on any subject that an audience would suggest. He was banished by the Spartans.

But preparation goes beyond the getting of the facts in the case you are to present: it includes also the ability to think and arrange your thoughts, a full and precise vocabulary, an easy manner of speech and breathing, absence of self-consciousness, and the several other characteristics of efficient delivery that have deserved special attention in other parts of this book rather than in this chapter.

Preparation may be either general or specific; usually it should be both. A life-time of reading, of companionship with stirring thoughts, of wrestling with the problems of life—this constitutes a general preparation of inestimable worth. Out of a well-stored mind, and—richer still—a broad experience, and—best of all—a warmly sympathetic heart, the speaker will have to draw much material that no *immediate* study could provide. General preparation consists of all that a man has put into himself, all that heredity and environment have instilled into him, and—that other rich source of preparedness for speech—the friendship of wise companions. When Schiller returned home after a visit with Goethe a friend remarked: “I am amazed by the progress Schiller can make within a single fortnight.” It was the progressive influence of a new friendship. Proper friendships form one

of the best means for the formation of ideas and ideals, for they enable one to practise in giving expression to thought. The speaker who would speak fluently before an audience should learn to speak fluently and entertainingly with a friend. Clarify your ideas by putting them in words; the talker gains as much from his conversation as the listener. You sometimes begin to converse on a subject thinking you have very little to say, but one idea gives birth to another, and you are surprised to learn that the more you give the more you have to give. This give-and-take of friendly conversation develops mentality, and fluency in expression. Longfellow said: "A single conversation across the table with a wise man is better than ten years' study of books," and Holmes whimsically yet none the less truthfully declared that half the time he talked to find out what he thought. But that method must not be applied on the platform!

After all this enrichment of life by storage, must come the special preparation for the particular speech. This is of so definite a sort that it warrants separate chapter-treatment later.

### Practise

But preparation must also be of another sort than the gathering, organizing, and shaping of materials—it must include *practise*, which, like mental preparation, must be both general and special.

Do not feel surprised or discouraged if practise on the principles of delivery herein laid down seems to retard your fluency. For a time, this will be inevitable. While you are working for proper inflection, for instance, inflection will be demanding your first thoughts, and the flow of your speech, for the time being, will be secondary. This warning, however, is strictly for the closet, for your practise at home. Do not carry any thoughts of inflection with you to the platform. There you must *think* only of your subject. There is an absolute telepathy between the audience and the speaker. If your thought goes to your gesture, their thought will too. If your

interest goes to the quality of your voice, they will be regarding that instead of what your voice is uttering.

You have doubtless been adjured to “forget everything but your subject.” This advice says either too much or too little. The truth is that while on the platform you must not *forget* a great many things that are not in your subject, but you must not *think* of them. Your attention must consciously go only to your message, but subconsciously you will be attending to the points of technique which have become more or less *habitual by practise*.

A nice balance between these two kinds of attention is important.

You can no more escape this law than you can live without air: Your platform gestures, your voice, your inflection, will all be just as good as your *habit* of gesture, voice, and inflection makes them—no better. Even the thought of whether you are speaking fluently or not will have the effect of marring your flow of speech.

Return to the opening chapter, on self-confidence, and again lay its precepts to heart. Learn by rules to speak without thinking of rules. It is not—or ought not to be—necessary for you to stop to think how to say the alphabet correctly, as a matter of fact it is slightly more difficult for you to repeat Z, Y, X than it is to say X, Y, Z—habit has established the order. Just so you must master the laws of efficiency in speaking until it is a second nature for you to speak correctly rather than otherwise. A beginner at the piano has a great deal of trouble with the mechanics of playing, but as time goes on his fingers become trained and almost instinctively wander over the keys correctly. As an inexperienced speaker you will find a great deal of difficulty at first in putting principles into practise, for you will be scared, like the young swimmer, and make some crude strokes, but if you persevere you will “win out.”

Thus, to sum up, the vocabulary you have enlarged by study,<sup>1</sup> the ease in speaking you have developed by practise, the economy of your well-

studied emphasis, all will subconsciously come to your aid on the platform. Then the habits you have formed will be earning you a splendid dividend. The fluency of your speech will be at the speed of flow your practise has made habitual.

But this means work. What good habit does not? No philosopher's stone that will act as a substitute for laborious practise has ever been found. If it were, it would be thrown away, because it would kill our greatest joy—the delight of acquisition. If public-speaking means to you a fuller life, you will know no greater happiness than a well-spoken speech. The time you have spent in gathering ideas and in private practise of speaking you will find amply rewarded.

## QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. What advantages has the fluent speaker over the hesitating talker?
2. What influences, within and without the man himself, work against fluency?
3. Select from the daily paper some topic for an address and make a three-minute address on it. Do your words come freely and your sentences flow out rhythmically? Practise *on the same topic* until they do.
4. Select some subject with which you are familiar and test your fluency by speaking extemporaneously.
5. Take one of the sentiments given below and, following the advice given on [pages 118-119](#), construct a short speech beginning with the last word in the sentence.

Machinery has created a new economic world.

The Socialist Party is a strenuous worker for peace.

He was a crushed and broken man when he left prison.

War must ultimately give way to world-wide arbitration.

The labor unions demand a more equal distribution of the wealth that labor creates.

6. Put the sentiments of Mr. Bryan's "Prince of Peace," on [page 448](#), into your own words. Honestly criticise your own effort.

7. Take any of the following quotations and make a five-minute speech on it without pausing to prepare. The first efforts may be very lame, but if you want speed on a typewriter, a record for a hundred-yard dash, or facility in speaking, you must practise, *practise*, *PRACTISE*.

There lives more faith in honest doubt,  
Believe me, than in half the creeds.

—TENNYSON, *In Memoriam*.

Howe'er it be, it seems to me,  
'Tis only noble to be good.  
Kind hearts are more than coronets,  
And simple faith than Norman blood.

—TENNYSON, *Lady Clara Vere de Vere*.

'Tis distance lends enchantment to the view  
And robes the mountain in its azure hue.

—CAMPBELL, *Pleasures of Hope*.

His best companions, innocence and health,  
And his best riches, ignorance of wealth.

—GOLDSMITH, *The Deserted Village*.

Beware of desperate steps! The darkest day,  
Live till tomorrow, will have passed away.

—COWPER, *Needless Alarm*.

My country is the world, and my religion is to do good.

—PAINE, *Rights of Man*.

Trade it may help, society extend,  
But lures the pirate, and corrupts the friend:  
It raises armies in a nation's aid,  
But bribes a senate, and the land's betray'd.

—POPE, *Moral Essays*.

O God, that men should put an enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains!—SHAKESPEARE, *Othello*.

It matters not how strait the gate,

How charged with punishment the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate,  
I am the captain of my soul.

—HENLEY, *Invictus*.

The world is so full of a number of things,  
I am sure we should all be happy as kings.

—STEVENSON, *A Child's Garden of Verses*.

If your morals are dreary, depend upon it they are wrong.

—STEVENSON, *Essays*.

Every advantage has its tax. I learn to be content.

—EMERSON, *Essays*.

8. Make a two-minute speech on any of the following general subjects, but you will find that your ideas will come more readily if you narrow your subject by taking some specific phase of it. For instance, instead of trying to speak on "Law" in general, take the proposition, "The Poor Man Cannot Afford to Prosecute;" or instead of dwelling on "Leisure," show how modern speed is creating more leisure. In this way you may expand this subject list indefinitely.

### *GENERAL THEMES*

Law.

Politics.

Woman's Suffrage.

Initiative and Referendum.

A Larger Navy.

War.

Peace.

Foreign Immigration.

The Liquor Traffic.

Labor Unions.

Strikes.  
Socialism.  
Single Tax.  
Tariff.  
Honesty.  
Courage.  
Hope.  
Love.  
Mercy.  
Kindness.  
Justice.  
Progress.  
Machinery.  
Invention.  
Wealth.  
Poverty.  
Agriculture.  
Science.  
Surgery.  
Haste.  
Leisure.  
Happiness.  
Health.  
Business.  
America.  
The Far East.  
Mobs.  
Colleges.  
Sports.  
Matrimony.



Divorce.  
Child Labor.  
Education.  
Books.  
The Theater.  
Literature.  
Electricity.  
Achievement.  
Failure.  
Public Speaking.  
Ideals.  
Conversation.  
The Most Dramatic Moment of My Life.  
My Happiest Days.  
Things Worth While.  
What I Hope to Achieve.  
My Greatest Desire.  
What I Would Do with a Million Dollars.  
Is Mankind Progressing?  
Our Greatest Need.

<sup>1</sup> See chapter on “Increasing the Vocabulary.”

<sup>1</sup>Money.